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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002468

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SUBJECT: POST-ELECTION CANDIDATE POSTURING

REF: KABUL 2457

Classified By: PolCouns APforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: President Hamid Karzai and presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah are both publicly positioning themselves as the winner before the International Electoral Commission's (IEC) preliminary election results are announced August 25, and both may blame fraud and lower turnout if the results do not favor them. The tone of both candidates remains measured thus far. Many analysts claim that if Karzai wins in the first round, Abdullah will cut a power sharing deal; clearly, the politics have not stopped just because the citizens have voted. End Summary.

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I WON
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¶2. (S) On August 22, Karzai's campaign advisor Waheed Omar said publicly, "based on initial information from media and our observers from areas where ballots were counted already, it shows that President Karzai is ahead of other candidates" (ref A). However, Omar told us separately that these were his "personal thoughts only," and that he was not speaking on behalf of Karzai in any official way. Karzai Advisor Sebghatullah Sanjar told us that Karzai was confident that he had won, and that he was making arrangements to ensure there would be no violence in the north when he will be declared the victor on August 25. He said the Karzai camp continued to consider a cabinet level position for Abdullah, perhaps again as Foreign Minister.

¶3. (S) Karzai supporter MP Fazel Karim Aimaq (Kunduz, Aimaq), told us Karzai was the certain winner, claiming 200,000 Karzai votes in Paktya and Paktika, while Abdullah received only 6,000 votes in these provinces. He remarked that the same occurred in many southern provinces, and also alleged that Ramazan Bashardost, a Hazara, took votes away from Abdullah in the north. He claimed "Abdullah will accept Karzai's win without encouraging violence," but asked the international community to help negotiate a power sharing agreement. MP Shukria Barakzai (Kabul, Pashtun), who claimed to support no candidate, said the elections process was a success, but that "unfortunately" Karzai was the winner.

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NO, I WON
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¶4. (S) On August 22, Abdullah told the press that "initial results from the provinces show that I have more than 50 percent of the vote" and in an Al Jazeera interview the same day, claimed that he led in the areas where he had received results from his agents (but admitted he had little information from the south.) "If there was no rigging, victory would be mine," he told Al-Sharq al-Awsat, an online newspaper. Abdullah's spokesperson Fazl Sangcharaki said the north had voted solidly for Abdullah except in Jowzjan

province, where Uzbek militia chieftain Abdul Rashid Dostum's return threw support to Karzai. Sangcharaki appeared on a political talk show on August 22, stating that Karzai had won in some provinces, while Abdullah had in others. Sangcharaki's calm tone and demeanor on the talk show led several of our interlocutors to believe that Abdullah is preparing for a power sharing deal with Karzai. They elaborated that Abdullah may be keeping the pressure on Karzai, by declaring victory, simply in order to improve his negotiating stance. Abdullah Advisor Farid Zikria denied this, saying it was "certain" that Abdullah, at a minimum, would push the race into a second round.

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LET'S MAKE A DEAL?
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15. (S) Afghanistan's Center for Research and Policy Director Haroun Mir - an occasional Abdullah advisor -- told us that the Abdullah camp, even if they do not win, "does not want to lose" and therefore will negotiate with Karzai to form a coalition government. A Kabul University Political Science Professor told us that due to the presence of Marshall Fahim, a prominent Tajik, on Karzai's team, the Tajik people would feel more comfortable with Karzai as President than the Pashtun people would feel with Abdullah. Salahuddin Rabbani, the advisor and son of Professor Rabbani (an Abdullah supporter), said that if there was a second round, it would be extremely important that the international community publically support the IEC's decision. Other Abdullah advisors told us that if there was a second round, Abdullah would gain more prominent Pashtuns on his ticket; however,

KABUL 00002468 002 OF 002

they acknowledged that a second round would heighten ethnic tensions.

16. (S) Abdullah Advisor Satar Murat claimed that Karzai will likely, "never want to leave the palace," if he lost, just as other warlords and Afghan leaders have avoided ever stepping down throughout history. Along these lines, members of the Junbesh party leadership told us they actually have more hope that Karzai will move Afghanistan from a presidential to a parliamentary system than Abdullah, despite Abdullah making that a key part of his campaign, because Karzai will want to remain in power -- and if he changed the government system to a parliamentary system, he eventually could become Prime Minister.

17. (S) If there is a second round, Haroun Mir said the Pashtuns could feel disenfranchised, since many of them were unable to vote due to security concerns. He said this is what the Taliban wanted, and that they reason that if Abdullah won, the ethnic Pashtuns will protest against a non-Pashtun leader. This would incite violence and push Pashtuns to the Taliban, as in the civil war in the 1990s. Mir also voiced concern about Balkh province, since Balkh Governor General Usted Mohammad Noor Atta (Tajik) was a faithful Abdullah supporter, and a Karzai appointee. The security situation would remain uncertain, in particular if the powerful Atta was dismissed by any future Karzai government, due to the presence of competing Pro-Karzai ethnic warlords in the province including MP Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq (Kabul, Hazara) and Dostum (Uzbek).
EIKENBERRY